



The Home Moravian Church
Winston-Salem, N. C.

BY
WILLIAM A. BLAIR

THE HOME MORAVIAN CHURCH

*"O! where are kings and empires now
Of old that went and came?
But, Lord! Thy Church is praying yet,
A thousand years the same."*

THE real name of this body of Christians is "Unitas Fratrum" or "Unity of Brethren" and that "Unity" is still maintained throughout the world in spite of "grim visag'd war" and civil discord, for all the different, individual churches, everywhere, belong to one body and are under one governing board. In 1749, however, the British Parliament recognized the body as an "Ancient Episcopal Church," and, in its official Acts, called the members "Moravians," since Moravia as well as Bohemia was an ancient seat of the denomination.

This is one of the very oldest of Protestant churches, a pre-Reformation church, spiritually descended from the Bohemian reformer and martyr, John Hus, who was burned at the stake in 1415. The formal organization was accomplished in 1457, thirty-five years before Columbus discovered America and sixty years before Luther lighted the torch of the Reformation. These Moravians hold no extended, specific creed nor formal articles of belief, but, in the humblest manner, simply accept the Bible as their rule of trust and practice, "Christ and Him Crucified" as their Confession of Faith, and pure, simple and unaffected living for His sake, as their aim in life. They still stand, as they always have, firmly planted on their ancient tested, tried and sure foundation and principle—"In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty, and, in all things, charity."

SETTLEMENT IN AMERICA.

Desirous of finding a place where they would be

free from persecution, and, with the idea of mission work among the Indians, the Brethren began to look, with longing eyes, from Europe, across the Atlantic to the broad acres of the new world. Their first settlement in America was in Savannah, Georgia, in 1735, forty-one years before the signing of the Declaration of Independence. A colony came to Bethlehem, Pa., in 1741, and the first settlement in North Carolina was made at Bethabara, (House of Passage), or, as it is usually called, Old Town, six miles northwest of Winston-Salem, in 1753. Then came Bethania in 1759 and Salem, (Peace), so named by Count Zinzendorf, in 1766.

Being a peculiarly devout and religious people, almost their first concern upon arrival was for some proper place of worship. Indeed the cutting of the very first trees for the earliest house was accompanied by the singing of hymns, for, "the groves were God's first temples," and morning and evening services were held in the dwelling so soon as it was under roof. The first consecrated hall of worship was a room in the third building, naively and attractively called the "two-story house," on the northwest corner of Main and Bank Streets, opposite the Belo building, and now marked by a tablet showing the exact location. But, these people were already planning for more ample and suitable accommodations, and, at Easter time in 1770 the corner stone for the Congregation building ("Gemein Haus") was laid with solemn, religious ceremony and the meeting hall in the building was consecrated on November 13, 1771. Here Governors, Congressmen, officers and dignitaries of various kinds, including members of the Assembly, or Legislature which met here in 1781 and 1782, attended service. The Brethren felt, however, that they could not grant the permission desired for the sessions to be held in their sacred meeting place but did provide rooms in a building near at hand. It was in this "Gemein Haus" that President George Washington worshipped with the brethren in 1791

and to it he came again to enjoy the music of its organ. The building, a large and imposing one, the most pretentious in this section of the state, with its stuccoed walls, dormer windows and its two main entrances on the western front, stood where the main hall of the college is now located. The first floor of the northern portion was occupied by the minister and his family, and in one of these rooms they allowed the Governor to make his quarters during the sessions of the Legislature, mentioned above. The single sisters occupied the southern part and their dormitories were on the third floor, above. The second story, entire, was used as the church. It seems almost impossible for us to understand how that handfull of brave men and women could have even thought of erecting such a building; but a far greater surprise is to follow. What a stupendous faith, courage, vision, and, even daring, these fathers must have had to conceive of and to erect, a little later, this church, which when finished, was, by far, the largest, finest and most imposing and important structure in the entire western portion of North Carolina!

THE HOME CHURCH

*"I love Thy Church, O God!
Her walls before Thee stand,
Dear as the apple of Thine eye,
And graven on Thy hand.
Beyond my highest joy,
I prize her heavenly ways,
Her sweet communion, solemn vows,
Her hymns of love and praise."*

It must be remembered that when, in April 1797 it was solemnly decided to erect this place of worship there were only about one hundred and fifty communicant members. The corner stone was laid in June 1798; it was under roof in 1799 and the building completed, and consecrated in the presence

of over two thousand people on Nov. 9, 1800. The architecture is pure Colonial German, noted for its simplicity, its strength, its plain outlines, heavy walls and strong construction. The appentice, or hood, over each of the doors is unique, alluring and practical, as well, and has attracted wide attention and interest for its singular beauty, loveliness and charm. The dimensions of the church were forty-six and a half by ninety-three feet, the length now being one hundred and ten, as the serving rooms and other improvements have been added to the eastern end. The height of the ceiling was twenty-six feet. The deep and wide foundations are of stone, the walls three feet or more in thickness, the timber of hand-hewn, selected oak more than twice the ordinary size; the floor was a double one with powdered tan bark placed between the two, and its seating capacity is so great that a thousand people at one time have partaken of Love Feast within its sacred walls. The brick for the walls and the tile for the roof were made in the meadow below the college. Few buildings, of half its age, are anything like so well preserved, but the old soapstone floor in the vestibule has been, long since, worn out under the trampling of many feet.

In 1841, the Congregation House, which had been used as a chapel since the completion of the new place of worship, was removed to be replaced by the Academy buildings and a small chapel was erected on the north side of the church. This was enlarged in 1881 and served its purpose until 1912 when the greater additions and improvements were made. When the building was first erected, the pulpit's position was in the north, and there was a gallery in the east and one for the organ and choir in the west. In 1854 a third gallery on the south side was built for the special use and accomodation of the Academy students. In 1870 quite extensive changes and substitutions were made. The gallery in the east was removed, and the pulpit placed in that end of the church. A new gallery was erected

on the north side, and the entire internal arrangements changed to correspond with such alterations as had been made. This arrangement was continued for many years.

In 1912 and 1913 the interior of the church was changed once more into its present form with the pulpit again where it had been placed in the beginning. The chapel was removed and replaced by the Rondthaler Memorial Sunday School Building with rooms for the minister, choir and others. The section next to the church is forty-one by forty-three feet in size and the Sunday School part is seventy-five by one hundred two in dimension, containing the auditorium and more than forty-two rooms for classes as well as several for other purposes. The entire building stands as a fine, though inadequate memorial to the life, service and accomplishment of that great, wise, consecrated leader, so loved and honored, the Rt. Rev. Edward Rondthaler, D.D., L.L.D., who, as pastor, bishop, president of the College and Academy, and, in various other capacities, served with marked distinction and success, not only the church, at home and abroad, but also the community and the state for more than fifty years, a record unprecedented, unparalleled and unsurpassed in Moravian history.

The chimes on the building are a memorial to Mr. Thomas Fleshman, a gift by his wife and daughter; and the organ in the church was presented by Mrs. Hannah Siewers and Miss Gertrude Siewers.

The octagonal tower, or cupola, from which the church band announces the death of members of the congregation, and, on festal occasions, thrills the air with music, which "exalts each joy, allays each fear," shelters the old bell, which, long before the church was built, "called the living and mourned the dead." On January 1, 1771, it was decided to order "a bell for Salem," and, on April 21, 1772 the diary quaintly says "the big bell was rung for the first time." At the beginning it was placed in a small tower on the northeast corner of the Square,

and was regarded with greatest curiosity, wonder and interest. A larger tower, similarly located was erected in 1780, pyramidal in shape, twelve feet square at the base, and about the height of the "Gemein Haus." The foundations were of stone and the cost was fifty-eight pounds, six pence,—each brother contributing seventeen shillings and each sister five. At first, the bell was regularly rung at 7 and 11:30 a. m., and at 7 p. m. Later, it struck the hours, and remained perched in its tower until the church was built, and a place for it provided in the cupola. There is but one inscription on the bell and that gives only the date and maker's name, reading simply, "Math. Tommerup 1771." This Matthias Tommerup, a most celebrated brazier and bell founder, was a Moravian brother from Denmark, who came to Bethlehem, Pa., in 1761 and who, in his successful career, cast many interesting and historic bells including the one for Bethabara. It was in front of his shop in the Brothers House that the Liberty Bell was unloaded, when, in 1777 it was rushed away from Philadelphia to prevent its falling into the hands of the British. It did not remain there, however, but was hidden in the cellar of Zion Church, Allentown, Pa., until the danger was over.

The church clock, so closely associated with the prompt and orderly life of the community, was ordered from Abraham Durninger and Sons, of Herrnhut, Germany in 1787, but did not arrive until 1790. In 1791 it was placed in the bell tower on the square, and, in 1806, Louis Eberhard perfected an arrangement by which it would strike the quarter hours. It had been decided to put this time piece in the tower of the church, but, as there was lack of space it was placed in the gable, as planned originally, where it still keeps time, ever reminding us that,

*"Our life's a clock, and every gasp of breath
Brings forth a warning grief 'till time shall
strike a death".*

In 1799 the weather vane and ball were ordered. The vane was to be made in Nazareth, Pa., and the figures, "1800" were to be cut in the tail. The ball was to be made in Lititz, and Benade in Nazareth was to cover with gold leaf and varnish or lacquer it. The vane itself is five feet long and the tail thirteen inches wide. The figures cut in it are each six inches high. The gilt ball is six feet, six and a half inches in circumference one way and seven feet five inches the other. The star is twelve inches wide and ninety-eight feet above the sidewalk. In 1892 the ball was taken down and freshly gilded, and it was ascertained that it could hold forty-three gallons of water.

The beautiful, artistic and heavy hand rails at the front steps are a local production, made and presented by Christopher Vogler. It is said that the material is Norway iron which does not oxidize when it comes in contact with air or water, and, hence, never rusts.

The church was originally lighted with candles. On May 27, 1800, five chandeliers were ordered, each with six arms, and so arranged that the candles were four inches, one from another. The small rosette holding the candles was painted yellow and the remainder of the chandelier was colored blue. Weights were arranged in the loft so that the lights could be raised or lowered as desired. The entire outfit has been carefully preserved and may be seen in the museum of the Wachovia Historical Society, together with the first pulpit, parts of the old church organ, and a host of other rare and interesting relics. Kerosene lamps succeeded the candles, and these, in turn, gave way to gas in 1857.

At first there was no heating arrangement, and, consequently shawls, cloaks, blankets, overcoats and "foot warmers" were in demand during the winter season.

THE WINDOWS

Many persons are inspired and deeply touched by

the series of ten rich windows, portraying and revealing, in pious art, the life and ministrations of the Saviour.

The subjects are as follows: The Nativity; The Flight Into Egypt; The Boy Jesus; In The Temple; Christ And The Children; Christ Knocking At The Door; Jesus, The Good Shepherd; Christ In Gethsemane; The Crucifixion; The Resurrection; and The Ascension. Look at Gethsemane and the Crucifixion. Does not a dark, sombre, depressing, shadowy light seem to fall upon them. Now view the Resurrection and the Ascension. Is there not about them a brilliant, gorgeous glory, as if Heaven's face, in favor, beamed upon them? It merely happened so, without arrangement, design or plan. Each window, is of course, hallowed and dedicated to the glory of God, but, in recognition of marked, outstanding service to the Church, it was deemed appropriate also, to do honor to the following leaders of sterling character, and invaluable worth. John Hus (1369-1415) "Reformer before the Reformation," Father of the Unitas Fratrum; Bishop Augustus Gottlieb Spangenberg, scholar, author, practical business man who led the movement to Wachovia and selected its site; Bishop John Amos Comenius, writer, philosopher, father of modern education, whose faith helped bind together the ancient and renewed Church; Bishop Count Nicholas Lewis Zinzendorf, nobleman, protector, leader and patron saint. Rev. Frederick William von Marshall, of exceptional talent, "Senior Civilis" and founder of Salem; Leonard Dobar and David Nitchmann, first missionaries to the heathen and their successors; Bishop Christian Frederick Gregor, father of Moravian music, composer, hymnologist and compiler of a hymn book used for a hundred years. Bishop John Jacob Van Vleck, educator, President of the Conference, and Bishop William Henry Van Vleck, eloquent and beloved, both pastors of the Home Church; Bishop Emil Adolphus deSchweinitz who, in addition to other services with consummate and almost un-

canny skill handled the temporal affairs of the Unity during the tense and trying period of the Civil War. Bishop George Frederick Bahnson who, with rare talent and tact, ably carried on through the dark, discouraging years following 1863.

GOD'S ACRE AND THE EASTER SERVICE.

The site for the beautiful and unique graveyard—"God's Acre"—where the Easter morning service is held was selected April 12, 1766, and was in the upper part of the present enclosure, but, when it was decided to place the Square one block lower down than had been originally planned, "God's Acre" was changed accordingly, as may be seen from the location of the oldest graves. The avenue was carefully laid out and cedar trees planted on either side, in the year 1770. The ground was consecrated, and the first body, that of John Birkhead, one of the eight men who first came to the settlement, was interred June 7, 1771. The first Easter service with the Liturgy was held this same year, but as at that date, no body had been buried in the graveyard, the exercises were conducted in the hall.

A striking feature of the graveyard is its recumbent stones, symbolizing the "democracy of death" and making it impossible to distinguish between the graves of rich and poor. The burial of members according to "choirs" or station in life rather than families is another distinguishing feature, carrying out the "choir system" which was introduced into the congregation for the better spiritual care of the membership.

GROWTH OF MORAVIANDOM.

The "Old Home Church," as it is familiarly called, has come in the course of the years to be a real "mother" church, with seven others and two chapels in the Winston-Salem community, witnessing to her zeal in extending the cause of the Kingdom at home. And in the Province, beyond the limits of the city, there are thirty-four other

Moravian congregations. The communicant membership of the Home Church alone is nearly fifteen hundred, and, in the Province, the total membership, including children, is in excess of twelve thousand.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHURCH MUSIC.

Church music of the very best, finest and highest class, music that "wakes the soul and lifts it high" has been strongly featured by the Moravians. From the Home Church, especially, an influence has gone forth into the churches of the Province and far beyond, calling for the elevation of church music to its highest plane, and discouraging the cheap and shallow variety of words and music which has sought to make itself popular in recent years. In addition to the usual lines of musical effort in the local church, strong emphasis has been laid upon the Church Band, which enlists boys and men in the service and makes possible such soul-stirring and uplifting music as that which thrills the thousands of Easter-worshippers year after year. Approval is given to the best grade of the so-called "gospel song," but the stately and more worshipful and dignified chorale is always given the preference.

FOND MEMORIES AND UPLIFTING INFLUENCES.

About this loved and venerable "shrine" as a precious inheritance for many souls, a thousand fond, sweet and tender traditions, memories and recollections, cluster in enchanting colors, clothing it with a splendor of beauty, grandeur, glory, unsurpassed and unexcelled. Here the Word is preached "in doctrine incorrupt, in language plain." Here many a one has given heart and life to God and some have heard a clear, compelling, clarion call to pulpit or to mission field. Here the great organ swells with "concord of sweet sounds," and "song

on its mighty pinions, takes every living soul and lifts it gently'' to the heaven above. Here little children are presented and received in baptismal sacrament and older ones are confirmed in the most holy faith. Here the cherished Love Feast, unspeakably rich in simplicity, dignity and grace, kindles a fine feeling of fellowship, equality, unison and love, and, under the spell of grand, majestic stately music, brings comfort, blessing, joy and peace. Here faithful believers meet about the table of their Lord to partake of that grand, impressive sacrament, where

*"They eat, they drink, and, in Communion
sweet*

Quaff immortality and joy."

Here fond husbands and fair and faithful wives have promised to care for, love and honor, to cherish and protect, so long as both shall live. Here, when comes the strange and stately dignity of death,—the great adventure,—are performed the last sad funeral rites for those, the "white sails of whose souls have rounded the last promontory" and have passed

*"Out of the storm of the doing
Into the peace of the done."*

Add to each of these scenes the fond and happy memory of all the joyous Christmas services, together with the sweet solemnities of the glad Easter day with its grand, triumphant note of a glorious resurrection and a fond reunion through faith in the risen Lord, and, at least, the outlines of the picture begin to develop and to appear.

*"When once thy foot enters the church, be bare.
God is more there than thou; for thou art there
Only by His permission. Then beware
And make thyself all reverence and fear."*